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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000468

SIPDIS

FOR EUR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC CARPENTER

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TAGS: AJ AR PGOV PREF PREL TU
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: USING IDPS TO SEND TOUGH MESSAGES
ABOUT THE MINSK GROUP

REF: A. BAKU 456
B. BAKU 445
C. BAKU 412

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse per 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 5, the Azeri IDP community held a congress supposedly to elect new leadership and to educate the international community about its plight. In reality, this was a Foreign Ministry-organized event intended to send strongly negative messages about the role of the Minsk Group in the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) peace process. Moreover, it provided the Turkish Ambassador, perhaps in collusion with the Azerbaijanis, with an opportunity to show leadership locally on the NK issue. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On June 5, the ethnic Azeri internally displaced persons (IDP) community from Nagorno-Karabakh held a carefully choreographed public spectacle aimed at bashing the Minsk Group peace process. The Foreign Ministry invited ambassadors to attend the plenary session of the first annual congress of the community as well as have a separate roundtable discussion with the presidium of the IDP representatives.

¶3. (C) According to the Romanian Ambassador, who was asked to speak at the Congress, this meeting was arranged by Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov, under direct instructions from the President and Presidential Administration Chief Ramiz Mehdiyev. Although technically a domestic political event, it had all the hallmarks of an MFA conference (poor organization, excessive protocol consciousness, official government translators, and talking points drawn directly from the words of senior government officials).

¶4. (SBU) Uniformly critical attacks against the Minsk Group and its three Co-Chairs (American, French and Russian) included:

-- (SBU) "They are like actors playing comedians, staying in luxury hotels and getting paid the salaries of ambassadors."

-- (SBU) "Why are they always traveling around meeting with the aggressors (read Armenia), and treating them as equals?"

-- (SBU) "I am a scientist by profession. Looking back at the 17 years of failure, I would assign the Minsk Group a productive coefficient rate of zero."

-- (SBU) "The Minsk Group Co-Chairs are always traveling to Karabakh but never come to meet with the Azeri IDP community."

-- (SBU) "There is irony in the Co-Chairs releasing

statements about these talks which are different from our own leaders."

TURKS ATTEMPT TO INSERT THEMSELVES

¶ 15. (C) Per instructions from the Co-Chairs, all of the 11 Minsk Group countries were represented at the level of DCM except for the Turkish Ambassador. He told Ambassador Derse that he had received instructions from Ankara to attend. During the small group meeting with the Minsk Group country representatives, the Turkish Ambassador had worked out with the organizers that he would co-chair the meeting, although most of the questions were directed at the representatives from Co-Chair countries. He insisted on physically sitting between the three representatives of the co-chair countries, against the strong protestations of the French DCM. He opened up with a long prepared speech about Turkey's support to Karabakh IDPs. He appeared to know several members of the Presidium in spite of having only served in Baku for a few months. (COMMENT: His behavior at least raised the suspicion that he was actively cooperating with the Azerbaijani MFA in staging the event. END COMMENT.)

PRESIDENTIAL APPARAT SPEAKS ON THE MEETING

¶ 16. (U) Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Novruz Mammadov told journalists, "There was one goal in the founding congress of the community -- Azerbaijani lands -- Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven regions around it are under

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Armenian occupation for 20 years . . . It is necessary to inform Europe and the United States about these and all realities around Nagorno-Karabakh."

¶ 17. (C) The official purpose of the first Azeri Congress of IDPs was to elect a president and presidium of leaders. This activity consumed less than 10 minutes of the four hour event and consisted of the "elected President," Bayram Safarov (the executive authority of Shusha city), reading a slate of 10 candidates for 10 positions and asking if there were any objections. The same was done for the presidency. The "winners" then proceeded with a long series of speeches with no objections recorded. When one participant tried to object (to the fact that they had not played the Azerbaijani national anthem), he was shouted at by the moderator and told to sit down.

¶ 18. (C) Local civil society activist and head of the Karabakh Council NGO, Arzu Abdullayeva, told the Ambassador that civil society had in fact suggested to the government that the government help organize the IDP community. The government had taken a good idea and turned it to its political purpose, she lamented.

COMMENT

¶ 19. (C) Azerbaijan can now claim that they have "elected" representatives of the Azeri community from NK. This counters, in their view, the activity of Armenia's Karabakh community, which presents itself at times as an independent government. Beyond that, this painfully long meeting served as yet another shot across the bow of the Minsk Group -- questioning its lack of results and why it does not impose a peace settlement on the region. All of the talking points used by the IDP representatives echo sentiments expressed by government officials. In spite of its now obvious campaign to pressure the Minsk Group, it is not clear that Azerbaijan yet has any serious proposals, beyond rhetoric, for alternate ways to advance an NK settlement.

DERSE